

Research on the Application of Domestication and Foreignization in Literary Translation

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Abstract: The domestication and foreignization were proposed by an Italian-American translation theorist Lawrence Venuti in *The Translator's Invisibility – A History of Translation* in 1995. He advocated resistance translation and opposed the invisibility of translators and the translation strategies he posed played a positive role in cross-cultural communication. This paper will review the formation and development process of Venuti's translation theory and analyze the differences and limitations between domestication and foreignization as well as the application of the two strategies in literary translation, hoping can provide some reference for literary translation.

Keywords: Domestication, Foreignization, Literary translation.

1. Introduction

The earliest discussion about translation could trace back to the 1st century AD and there was no systematic translation theory before 20th century, which we called it classical translation theory period. During this period, there was a famous discuss about literal translation and free translation. In 1960s, comparative linguistics became popular and many scholars began to study translation with linguistic theory, mainly focusing on equivalence in translation. In the late 1970s, Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury successively proposed multiple systems theory and descriptive translation and the translation studies entered the era of descriptive translation (DTS). The translation studies were no longer confined to the text itself and the linguistic era's dogmatic belief of "fidelity" and "equivalence" has been reversed. The 1990s was a prosperous age for translation studies in a cultural perspectives with translation studies developing in depth and various levels, including discourse, gender, ideology, etc. The exploration and construction of translation studies kept developing and at the same time some new schools emerged, such as the feminism and post-colonial schools. Both of them advocated to express political and ideological claims through texts. In the same period, the Italian-American translation theorist Lawrence Venuti put forward the domestication and foreignization theory based on deconstructionism in his famous book *The Translator's Invisibility – A History of Translation* in 1995, as well as the concept of translator invisibility, which advocated that translators should adopt foreignization strategies to counter the cultural hegemony of the Western countries, especially the United Kingdom and the United States.

2. Venuti's Translation Theory

2.1. The Origin of Venuti's Translation Theory

In terms of the historical origins, Venuti's translation theory has been influenced by a number of theorists and the concepts of domestication and foreignization came from *On the Different Methods of Translating* of a German translation theorist Schleiermacher. According to Schleiermacher, there were two major ways to help the target readers to understand the original correctly and completely without detaching

himself from the target language:

Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him, or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him.

Schleiermacher advocated using domestication to rebel against the hegemonic French culture at that time and finding a place for German language and culture to survive.

The French translator, historian and translation theorist Antoine Berman (1942-1991) discussed the process of assimilation of Western cultures into other languages and cultures in *The Experience of the Foreign: Culture and Translation in Romantic Germany* and *Translation and the Trial of the Foreign*. The "trial" is a kind of banishment of the original text from its native land, allowing the translation to adapt to the local culture and customs and being fully assimilated. The theories of Schleiermacher and Berman became the cornerstones of Venuti's translation theory. And the concepts of domestication and foreignization were further introduced into a post-colonial context.

Apart from the two scholars mentioned above, Venuti's translation theory also absorbed and drew on many other factors, such as the impacts of states, nationality and other ideas on the translation process, and then developed his translation theory on the basis of deconstructionist views.

2.2. Main Theoretical Concepts

2.2.1. The Invisibility of the Translator

Venuti quoted the perspective of Norman Shapiro in *The Translators' Invisibility: A History of Translation*, explaining the concept of the invisibility of the translator.

The final goal of translation is to provide a smooth text to the target language reader, which requires that the translation should be transparent without traces of the translators or the translation. For the target readers, the feeling of reading the translation text is the same as that of reading the original text, which is similar to Nida's Reader's Response Theory. If there are ambiguities and discrepancies in translation text, it will not be fluent for target readers to read. And the reflections of the translator's personality or intention are just like the scratches and bubbles on the glass, which make target text different from the original text. While a translated text, whether it is a fiction or propose, should be acceptable and

fluent for target readers. The absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, directly reflecting the original writer's personality, intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text. In other words, the translation is not in fact a translation, but the "original text". The more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator, and, presumably, the more visible the writer or meaning of the foreign text. The translator is considered to be able to erase the traces of the translator as much as possible, so that the translation is more natural and smooth.

2.2.2. Domestication Translation

Domestication translation is to violently replace the language and cultural differences of foreign texts and provide a readable text for the readers language readers, which makes the translation more fluent and smooth.

According to the differences of culture and language among different countries, target readers always feel unfamiliar or obscure when reading the translated text and think it difficult to read. The final aim of domestication translation is to make the translation fluent and easy to understand, so that the reader is in transparency and there is no difference between reading the original text and the translation. But at the same time this translation theory erases the original unique culture and the characters of the source language, which is not conducive for culture communication and exchange among different countries. The more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator, and, presumably, the more visible the writer or meaning of the foreign text. The translation seems to be not a translation, but the original work. This is why it is also known as the translator's invisibility.

2.2.3. Foreignization Translation

The definition of foreignization translation is that translators deliberately breaks target conventions by retaining something of the foreignness of the original.

The strategy of foreignization refers to translations that deviate from the mainstream local values, regardless of language and cultural differences, and retain some of the exoticism of the original text. Translations retain the exoticism of the original text to a certain extent and deliberately break the conventions of the target language. During the cultural exchange and communication among different countries, foreignization translation advocates retaining the local specialists and exoticism of the source language culture, so that readers can know the culture and history of the source language. In the history of language development in China, we have absorbed many foreign cultures and languages, such as the words of Buddhist scriptures, like "般若(prajna)" "浮屠(pagoda)", as well as the Western words such as "underground" "train" "sofa" "clone". This introduced languages greatly enriched our culture and language, which made us appreciate the different culture and history of the world. At the same time, our literary works have also been translated to other countries, such as Pound's *The Divine Collection*, which preserved our native language and culture and spread the Chinese culture to the world, allowing foreign readers to know the original source language and culture. Through foreignization translation we can feel the presence and the value of the translator, so this process is also known as the translator's visibility.

3. The Reason of Visibility of Translators

3.1. Smooth Translation

In Venuti's opinion, works with a wider circulation and scope have one characteristic that is fluency. When translating, fluency has become a standard and works that are not fluent are often considered as poor and inauthentic translation. For the readers, the translation should be readable and easy to understand.

For the general public, when reading foreign works, they often feel obscure and difficult to understand or read and feel a sense of alienation. Therefore, fluency has gradually become a translation standard, requiring translators to approach readers and consider the readability of the translation to make translation easy to understand.

3.2. Affected by Individual Copyrights

The most important thing for translators is to convey the original author's thoughts and intentions, rather than to recreate and change the theme and ideas of the original text, so the translator's role is to paraphrase and express the original author's text. The translation is not original but just a translation and an imitation of the original text. Therefore, the translator is influenced by the copyright of the original text and the original author in the translation process. The translator makes the translation fluent so that the reader of the source language and the reader of the target language have the same feeling and that's why translator is naturally invisible.

3.3. Other Influential Factors

The translator is in a secondary and subordinate position to the original author. When the translated work is published, it is influenced by other uncontrollable factors, including the publisher's demands for smooth and readable translations, which is more acceptable to the public, and including the reader's preference for an easy-to-read work, as well as the impact of sponsors, critics and so on. The translator has a lower voice and lower status in the whole process, so translation methods and strategies will be influenced by factors that force them to make concessions and cater to the public. The translators, of course, want their translation to be published and sell well, so they will also give more consideration to mainstream culture and improve his cultural identity.

4. The Foreignization and Domestication

4.1. The Difference of Foreignization and Domestication

Foreignization and domestication are two contradictory concepts or translation strategies. Domestication requires reducing the sense of unfamiliarity brought by different cultural differences, satisfying the reader's demand for readability of the translation, and ensuring the translation is as smooth and fluent as possible when translating. While foreignization requires preserving the cultural characteristics and national identity of the source language, so that the reader can experience and recognize it as if they were there.

The difference between the two strategies lies in the different starting points. In terms of the starting point and the purpose of translation, foreignization requires the translator

to be closer to the author, to present the culture and folklore of the source language as well as the language form and style in an original manner, attempting to present original favour of the source language. The aim of a domestication, on the other hand, is to enable the target readers to read fluently and smoothly and to feel the beauty and ideas of the original work as if it were being read without a sense of unfamiliarity. Because the starting points are opposite, so sometimes the two aims cannot be achieved at the same time. If the strategy of foreignization is adopted, the reader will find it obscure and without a sense of cultural identity. If the readability is to be improved, the unique cultural ideas contained in the source language will be erased, so the two aims are opposites.

4.2. The Relationship of Foreignization and Domestication

According to the definition, domestication refers to the translation process in which the translator should consider the reading habits of the reader and make the translation as smooth and fluent as possible, so that the reader is in transparency and the sense of unfamiliarity brought about by cultural differences reduces. While foreignization refers to the translator retaining the culture of the source language in the translation process, including language features and expressions, so that the reader can experience the original and exotic atmosphere.

The two strategies of foreignization and domestication do not exist independently or in complete opposition to each other, but complement each other and contribute to each other. The discussion of foreignization and domestication in translation circles just like free translation and literal translation has been intense and long-lasting. Under different cultural differences and historical backgrounds, the choice between the two strategies is different.

And there will not be a single choice of domestication or foreignization strategies and any translation strategy has its own value and meaning, so translators usually consider a variety of translation strategies when translating. Domestication and foreignization strategies are not completely used in the whole passage, or one strategy is used instead of another. In fact, in the process of translation, the translator will choose the translation strategy according to different starting points and purposes, so that the translation becomes more and more acceptable to the public and has great value and meaning, and can spread the voices of different countries and nations. Therefore, foreignization and domestication are complementary and mutually beneficial. From a historical point of view, domestication may have dominated in the past. But nowadays, with the development of society, mutual communication among countries, nationalities and different groups is becoming more and more frequent and countries all of the world want to spread their national culture and history. The strategies of domestication and foreignization are gradually developing and manifesting themselves without one another. The combined use of different translations is in line with the development of the times.

5. Translation History of *Tao Te Ching*

The *Tao Te Ching* was written by Laozi, the founder of the Taoist School in ancient China, whose surname was Li Er and born in the Spring and Autumn Period. Laozi was a famous thinker and philosopher and had a major impact on Chinese

society and history. *Tao Te Ching* was divided into two parts: the Te Ching (chapters 1-37) and the Tao Ching (chapters 38-81). The book had a total of 81 chapters and more than 5,000 words. The *Tao Te Ching* is the first systematic and complete philosophical work in Chinese history with very rich philosophical ideas and aesthetic values and has an extremely profound impact on traditional Chinese philosophy, politics and religion. The classic catechisms of Taoism have been derived from the *Tao Te Ching* and the work is known as the treasure of the Chinese nation.

According to historical records, the *Tao Te Ching* was firstly translated into Latin in the 18th century and then spread to the West. The *Tao Te Ching* has since been translated into various versions in different languages and from different perspectives. According to UNESCO, the *Tao Te Ching* is the second most translated book of world with the Bible ranking first. We all know that the Bible has been translated into many languages and versions in the Western world, including Latin, German and Spanish, and it has a pivotal status in the Western world. The *Tao Te Ching* has been widely disseminated and there are almost 643 versions of the *Tao Te Ching*, obtaining great attention and approval.

5.1. The First Translation Climax of *Tao Te Ching*

According to the translation history of China, there are four major periods of translation. The history of the translation of the *Tao Te Ching* can be roughly divided into three periods. The 18th to 19th centuries can be regarded as the initial stage of the translation of the *Tao Te Ching*. This period corresponds to the late Ming and early Qing dynasties in China and a large number of Western missionaries came to China with the aim of propagating the Bible and spreading the Christianity. At the same time, the advanced Western science and technology and philosophy were introduced into China. In order to better spread the Christianity, these missionaries took the initiative to learn the Chinese history and culture, hoping to spread Christianity in a way that would be pleasing to the Chinese. In China, Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism were the three major Chinese religions. Western missionaries were keen to interpret some Chinese canonical writings in terms of Western Christian doctrine and many literal works were translated, such as *Tao Te Ching*.

5.2. The Second Translation Climax of *Tao Te Ching*

In the special international situation, two large-scale world wars broke out, which had an indelible impact on the aggrieved groups. Both World Wars were caused by fascism, especially Nazi Germany, which led to numerous crises in Western society and unbearable suffering for the people. Westerners and Easterners began to reconsider whether Western culture was really superior.

During this period, the main battlefield of the East was China and many Chinese classics and works flowed into the rest of the world. Many translators saw the importance of *Tao Te Ching*. The philosophy of natural harmony, such as great virtue is like water and inaction in Taoist culture can be used to save the laboring world and heal the suffering of the people. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the translation of *Tao Te Ching* has entered a prosperous period.

5.3. The Third Translation Climax of *Tao Te Ching*

And since the 1970s, there has been a spurt of cultural development. Many translation theories and translation strategies have developed and the number of translators keeps growing. The universal values proclaimed in Laozi's *Tao Te Ching* have received increasing attention. More and more scholars study *Tao Te Ching* and translate diverse versions and language of *Tao Te Ching*. *Tao Te Ching* is famous work with profound philosophy and thoughts, which it is still worthy to learn and translate.

6. The Analysis of the Foreignization and Domestication in the Two Versions of *Tao Te Ching*

6.1. A Brief Introduction to the Translators

Taking the translated versions of James Legge and Lin Yutang as examples, this paper will analyse the effects of different translation strategies.

As the first group of Western missionaries to China, James Legge shouldered the task of spreading Christianity to China to spread the gospel. Although he was a foreigner, he was knowledgeable of Chinese history and culture. And he translated many Chinese classics during his missionary in China, such as *The Doctrine of the Mean* and *The Book of Changes*. Although he was a missionary, James believed that he should also have a better understanding of traditional Chinese culture before preaching.

Lin Yutang was proficient in Chinese and Western languages and was a famous literary scholar and translator at that time. He loved Taoist culture and enjoyed comfortable and leisure life.

6.2. The Translated Version of James Legge

When translating *Tao Te Ching*, James Legge applied domestication and foreignization and other strategies to spread Chinese culture and make translation fluent and easy to read.

In order to express the main thoughts of Taoist directly, James chose to respect the original text and adopted the strategy of foreignization and literal translation, preserving the linguistic form, content and style of the original text. For example, he transliterated the word “道” as “Dao”, preserving the spiritual essence of “道” and respected the source language culture. In his translation, you can also find the figure of Old English style, such as “doth, yea, aye, e'er, vale, oft”, which often appeared in English grammatical poetry and invisibly enhanced the literary character of the translation.

In James Legge's translation, the domestication strategy was also used. The teachings of Christianity are deeply rooted in the Western countries and their cultures and it is easy to find Christian thought in James' translation. For example, James translated “无名，天地之始” into “... is the Originator of heaven and earth...”. He did not translate “始” as the neutral word “beginning” but translated to “the Originator”, which echoed the story in *The Book of Genesis*.

In addition, the Christian thoughts are also evident in the annotations of the translation. James translated the phrase “五色令人目盲；五音令人耳聋；五味令人口爽” into “Colour's five hues from th' eyes their sight will take; Music's five notes

the ears as deaf can make...” and added the annotation “The five colours are Black, Red, Green or Blue, White and Yellow...” (Legge, 1891:55)

With the purposes of culture communication, James combined the domestication and foreignization strategies to maintain the style and connotation of the original text. At the same time, he added annotations, making the translation more understandable and readable for the target readers.

6.3. The Translated Version of Lin Yutang

When translating *Tao Te Ching*, Lin Yutang used his three principles of translation (faithfulness, smoothness, and beauty) to make his translation fluent and easy to understand. At the same time, he conducted a lot of in-depth research on the original work and his translations contained many words and phrases that vividly conveyed the meaning of the original text. Lin Yutang's translation of the *Tao Te Ching* was to show the excellent traditional Chinese culture and philosophical thoughts of Taoism to the West.

When translating the title, he did not adopt literal translation and translated it as “The Wisdom of Laozi”. Lin Yutang did not translate it according to the traditional chapters of *Tao Te Ching*, but divided it into seven volumes, and formulated the title for each volume and chapter according to his own understanding. While being close to Western language structures and expressions, it was also as close to the original text as possible. For example, the translation of “无名，天地之始” was “The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth...” (Lin Yutang, 2012: 23). Among them “始” was translated into “the origin”, whose religious meaning is not as strong as “the Originator”, which might help Western readers understand the meaning of the original text and the cultural connotation comprehensively. In addition, Lin Yutang's translation language was more understandable and the imagery in the original text was also vividly expressed. For example, in the fourth chapter, the original text “渊兮，似万物之宗” was translated as “Fathomless! Like the fountain head of all things.” (Lin Yutang, 2012: 87). The word “宗” means the origin of everything and Lin Yutang vividly expressed the meaning of the original text with the translation “the fountain head”, which increased the readability of the translation. Compared with the translated version of James, Lin Yutang's version basically conforms to the writing style of the original work and the translation gives people a beautiful reading experience. For example, Lin Yutang translated: “天地不仁，以万物为刍狗；圣人不仁，以百姓为刍狗.....” into:

“Nature is unkind:

It treats the creation like sacrificial straw-dogs.

The Sage is unkind:

He treats the people like sacrificial straw-dog...” (Lin Yutang, 2012: 95)

The visual arrangement of the whole chapter is neat and orderly and will not cause readers to fatigue reading. It is not only catchy and rhythmic, but also faithful to the original text and close to the cognitive habits of the reader.

7. Foreignization and Domestication in Literary Translation

7.1. The application of the strategies in literary translation

In the history of China, the cause of translation has experienced five great climaxes so far, including the Buddhist scriptures from the Eastern Han to the Tang and Song dynasties, the translation of science and technology in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, the translation of Western studies during the Opium War and the May Fourth Movement and so on. From the 1970s to now, the translation of Eastern and Western literature when translation has blossomed in all fields.

When translating the Buddhist scriptures, there was a famous discussion about literal translation and free translation, which was the archetypes of domestication and foreignization. While in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, there was a large number of translations of scientific and technical genre texts, mostly using domestication to make it easy to read. While from the late Qing dynasty and the early Republican period, Chinese literary scholars and translators began to translate a large number of foreign literary, political and scientific and technical works. And the translators were not thinking about being faithful to the original works, but about how to adapt to the social and cultural needs of that time. The popularization and spread of vernacular Chinese jumped out of the literary form and such translations were more easily accepted by the public. While translators who still insisted on taking Classical Chinese as original texts had to rewrite and delete some sentences of the original texts because the original texts were relatively obscure and difficult to understand. Therefore domestication strategies dominated at this stage. With the outbreak of the May Fourth New Culture Movement, a new high tide of literary translation was set in motion in China. Led by Lu Xun, Guo Mo and Mao Dun, writers and translators at that time tried to draw nutrients from foreign literature in order to achieve the purpose of transforming literature, society and providing ideas and culture. Lu Xun proposed the translation strategies of “易解” and “丰姿”, Zhang Gu Ruo proposed “以信为主, 以顺为辅” “宁信而不顺”. When translating the complete works of Shakespeare, Zhu Shenghao clearly opposed the rigid word-by-word translation and advocated maintaining the “神味” and “神韵” of the original works. The literary translations of China from the late Qing Dynasty to the Cultural Revolution placed more emphasis on conveying the divine charm of the original text, and were not bound by formalities, but rather on the smoothness and fluency of the translation. Many translators altered the structure of the original text and deleted and rewrote the original text. In the 1980s and 1990s, inspired by Western translation theories, Chinese scholars and translators reconsidered foreignization and domestication.

With the globalization sweeping across the world, the communication and fusion of cultures is becoming increasingly frequent, and the heterogeneity of cultures seems to be gradually fading. We can see a phenomenon of domestication and foreignization combination in 21st century literary translation. Instead of absolutely promoting only one translation strategy, foreignization and domestication are unified and rationally adopted. On the other hand, there are calls for “cultural pluralism” and “anti-cultural assimilation”,

which requires a growing awareness of the need to maintain the cultural characteristics of each nationality with foreignization still dominating in the promotion of cultural transmission. The application of domestication and foreignization strategies will continue to play a crucial role in translation as a bridge for language and culture communication.

7.2. The Application of the Two Strategies under Cross-Cultural Communication

As China's overall strength continues to grow, it has a pivotal role and status in the world. More and more foreigners and visitors want to get to know China, and China also needs to spread Chinese culture and civilization, present a good and positive image. So Venuti's strategy of foreignization is particularly important in today's society. There are many literary works have been translated in many versions, such as *The Art of War*, *The Analects of Confucius* and so on, which help to spread traditional culture and philosophies. In recent years, many Chinese literature works get international awards, such as Mo Yan's *Frog*, which won the Nobel Prize for Literature, and political works like *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*, which has been translated into many languages and versions. There are many classics and unique traditional stories adopting foreignization to spread Chinese culture and history, so that the rest of the world can better get to know China. But it have more requirements for readers with more acknowledgement about China and some words and phrases with deeper content and meaning are hard to understand. Therefore it is not feasible to only adopt the strategy of foreignization and it is necessary to combine the two strategies to make the translation fluent and readable, so that the target readers can better understand the meaning and ideas of the original text.

8. Summary

Venuti's theory concepts on translation are still of great exploration value to this day and the strategies of invisibility and domestication and foreignization are instructive for translation. Its advocacy of using foreignization to oppose dominant culture has certain progressive significance. Resisting strong invasion to weak civilization from English-speaking countries and reflecting the culture and civilization can facilitate communication and dissemination among different civilizations. When translating poetry, prose and fictions, we can combine the translation strategies of domestication and foreignization to make translation more readable and fluent. With the development of the times, cross-cultural communication are becoming more and more frequent and how to spread Chinese literature and culture has become a challenge. The strategy of foreignization can promote the exchange between different cultures and the spread of the source language and culture, which is of great value in today's society, but it must also be used in combination with domestication to make the translation more acceptable to target readers.

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